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SUBJECT: MARCH 15 NIGERIA AVIAN FLU UPDATE

REF: ABUJA 576

1. Summary. The Vom laboratory confirmed an outbreak of H5N1 in Anambra State, but the state agriculture commissioner rejected this finding. The AI outbreak in Ogun State continues, but the GON has not heard from its Ogun field team. An Ogun official said containing the outbreak would be a "tough task." A GON official said there was no active surveillance in Ogun and that information on confirmed AI cases was being hoarded. The official said the GON needed to contact Benin and Cameroon on the AI issue, and that Niger had accused Nigeria of exporting AI to it. The CDC and WHO reported progress on human-surveillance AI programs. End summary.

2. Economic officer and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) officers attended the March 10 and March 13 coordination meetings at the Government of Nigeria's (GON) Avian Influenza (AI) Crisis Management Center. A GON official said Mar. 10 that epidemiological teams joined agricultural teams in the field to investigate AI outbreaks in Benue, Rivers, and Anambra States.

Anambra declares AI present -- on a voice vote

3. A team member who returned from Anambra said that state's agriculture commissioner was "in denial" despite the affected poultry farm having a 100% mortality rate. Samples from this farm were sent to the Vom National Veterinary Research Institute, which confirmed a diagnosis of H5N1 -- but the agriculture commissioner rejected this diagnosis. The Anambra governor, who had not been aware of an AI outbreak in the state, sent his chief of staff, who calmed the situation. State officials attending a meeting on the outbreak held a "voice vote" and declared AI present in Anambra. The GON official said an Anambra official wanted to cull all birds within 3 km of the infected site but had no vehicles or logistical support, and that the agriculture commissioner would not allocate funds. He termed Anambra "quite weak and deficient" against AI.

4. A GON veterinary official said March 13 that Anambra now had an AI technical committee that meets daily. He said no culling had been carried out, and "I think they need help" at the one farm affected to date. The chair said, "I'm very concerned" that information on confirmed AI cases was available but was not being circulated, including by the University of Ibadan's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Instead, "Information was being hoarded."

5. A representative of the Poultry Association of Nigeria (PAN) said the team should have appealed immediately to Abuja for funds, but the meeting chairman said Nigeria was a federal system, so the state concerned was in charge. The GON could not give federal funds to states but only items provided by donors, the chair said. A GON official denied the PAN representative's request that the PAN participate in the Anambra investigation. In discussing reports of large numbers of chickens being raised in and near homes, a GON official said field teams had not found more than 40 to 50 chickens per house, and that a total of 500 chicken at a house was not possible.

6. The chair said that that following assistance from the CDC, the Vom laboratory now could test animal samples for H5N1. Nigeria's AI protocol previously did not permit the owner of an infected flock to receive a laboratory report confirming AI. Now, on the day on which the Vom laboratory confirms AI, it informs the AI Crisis Management chairman and the state governor concerned. The chair called on the GON to distribute Tamiflu to reassure the population.

7. The chair said additional compensation for birds had been calculated as follows, with no payment date specified: Nasarawa State, 517 farmers to receive a total of 3.14 million naira (about USD 24,000) because Nasarawa largely had rural and backyard farmers; 21 million naira for six Bauchi farmers; 1.017 million naira for six Katsina farmers;

and additional money for Kano State -- 12 million naira for 11 farmers for culling carried out after Feb. 27. The chair said the GON had put aside 100 million naira for compensation "to get people to report sick birds" early in the process.

AI situation in Ogun is worrisome, but unclear

18. The chair said on March 13 that the government had not received a report from its field team in Ogun State -- although the GON announced March 9 that Ogun was confirmed positive for the H5 virus. Ogun's health commissioner said the outbreak there occurred on an Akute-Oja farm with 90,000 birds, but test results were not back from Italy. Ogun's government had not yet alerted the press and was awaiting confirmation to avoid causing "panic." Containing the Akute-Oje outbreak was a "tough task" because the area was congested, built up rapidly, and had no roads. She had no additional information on the outbreak and hoped the federal government would have information for her.

19. The chair said the Vom laboratory confirmed H5N1 at an Akute-Oja farm, and he called for stern measures to be taken. He said culling was "apparently" occurring at two locations in Akute-Oja. A Ministry of Agriculture official had no figures for Ogun bird die-offs but said bird mortality there had worsened significantly. The chair said unhappily, "There is no active surveillance in Ogun; we are still waiting for farmers to tell us" what is happening. He asked the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to confirm reports of AI in the southwest. The chair said Nigeria's major AI problem areas were in Ogun, because of population density, and in Nasarawa, because of Nasarawa officials' lack of cooperation.

CDC and WHO report progress on surveillance

10. A CDC official said a CDC team returned March 12 from three days in Kano State laying the groundwork for a sero-survey of poultry workers, persons employed at poultry markets, and veterinarians. The CDC developed a questionnaire and will take blood samples. The survey seeks 300 participants. If 300 are enrolled, no positive AI tests within the group would mean its members had a positive rate no higher than 1.5 percent. The CDC is awaiting approval from the health minister and the Kano State health commissioner. The chair said the GON might provide funds "this week" for the sero-study and to establish a database of people at the highest risk for AI. He said the GON had formed teams and was awaiting funding to send teams to the field for three to four weeks. GON field teams would piggyback on the CDC's Kano team and on a similar World Health Organization (WHO) team in Kaduna State.

11. A WHO official said the WHO was concentrating on AI in Kaduna State and in five or six other states. The WHO would work on case definitions and emphasize reporting and registering persons through the WHO, while building on what the CDC has achieved. The WHO will work on enhanced surveillance of cases in Kaduna, to check for H5N1 in at-risk humans. It would carry out community-based veterinary and wild-bird and poultry surveillance based on weekly surveys. A CDC official said the CDC had made recommendations on a GON communications strategy that has identified ways in which AI messages can be fine-tuned so as to not frighten people.

12. The chair said the GON would identify facilities for human cases for isolation and quarantine, and would begin drills and simulations by the week of March 20-24. The GON would identify one hospital in each state for human isolation cases, and specify public buildings and schools for quarantine cases. The chair said that at the direction of President Obasanjo, AI workers were exempted from the requirement that Nigerians stay home for part or all of March 21-25 to be counted in the national census.

13. The chair said the GON needed to contact Benin and Cameroon on the AI issue, and that Niger had accused Nigeria of exporting AI to it, despite migratory birds' travel between the two countries.

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